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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #812

Missing in Action Recovery and Identification Project (UW System)

[LFB 2023-25 Budget Summary: Page 667, #9]

CURRENT LAW

The UW MIA recovery and identification project (the MIA project) consists of a multidisciplinary team of researchers, students, veterans, alumni, and volunteers working on furthering the recovery and identification of missing-in-action American service members. Founded in 2015 at the UW-Madison Biotechnology Center, the project utilizes a team of UW-System faculty, staff, and student volunteers across multiple academic disciplines including archeology, forensic anthropology, history, business management, and biology (genetic analysis) to perform site surveys and assist in the discovery, careful exhumation, identification, and repatriation of remains. Recoveries are currently funded through in-kind contributions from base resources, volunteer work, and moneys for specific missions from the Department of Defense.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Assembly Bill 43/Senate Bill 70 would provide \$500,000 GPR annually in a new, continuing appropriation for the MIA project. Under the proposal, the Board of Regents would be required to provide funding from this appropriation for the MIA project to perform a mission for the recovery and identification of Wisconsin veterans who are missing in action. At the conclusion of the mission, the bill would require the MIA Recovery Project, through its representative, to submit a report on the mission's findings and an accounting of expenditures for the mission to the Governor, Joint Committee on Finance, Board of Regents, the standing committees of each house of the Legislature dealing with veterans matters, and the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Military Affairs.
2. The UW MIA project partners with the U.S. Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA), the agency responsible for identifying and repatriating the remains of

U.S. service members. The UW MIA project was the first academic institution to partner with DPAA. With the UW MIA project as a model, the DPAA now partners with over 50 academic and non-profit institutions for MIA identifications.

3. According to the project, there are over 82,000 missing-in-action American service members currently unaccounted for as a result of conflicts since the Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941, including over 1,500 Wisconsin service members. The DPAA assigns missing-in-action recovery cases and provides informational and logistical support to aid in recovery efforts. During the academic year, the UW MIA project team conducts research about missing service members, uses mapping sites to identify possible locations, and contacts and interviews potential witnesses in order to find a site where the remains of an MIA service member may be located. The UW MIA project then sends a field investigative team to the sites to confirm their findings. Once confirmed, planning for the UW MIA project recovery can proceed. Concurrently, the UW MIA project is assigned a recovery mission by the DPAA during the summer field season. These recovery teams typically consist of one U.S. veteran and 10 to 20 instructors and students, with students generally making up more than half of the team. Multiple UW-System campuses have been involved in field missions including UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee, UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha, UW-Oshkosh, and UW-Oshkosh Fox Cities. Artifacts and human remains at search sites are turned over by the UW team to the federal police within that nation to have the remains transported to UW-Madison or DPAA for forensic analysis and DNA testing. UW MIA project communicates with DPAA throughout the process and the honors and burial are performed and supported by DPAA.

4. Past field efforts have focused on the European theater of World War II. For example, in the summers of 2016 and 2017, the team led the successful recovery of First Lieutenant Frank Fazekas, a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter pilot who was shot down and killed in action on May 22nd, 1944, in France. First Lt. Fazekas was later buried with full honors in Arlington National Cemetery. In summer 2018, the team successfully recovered the remains of Second Lieutenant Walter B. Stone, a P-47 Thunderbolt fighter pilot who was shot down and killed in action on October 22nd, 1943, in France. Second Lt. Stone was buried in his hometown of Andalusia, Alabama, next to his family. In summer 2019, the team executed a recovery mission of a WWII American service member in Northern Europe, with efforts currently ongoing in 2022 and 2023. The team scouted their first Wisconsin-investigated case in Poland in fall, 2022.

5. Alternatively, 2023 Assembly Bill 26 (and a companion bill Senate Bill 8) would provide \$180,000 GPR in 2023-24 and \$180,000 GPR in 2024-25 in the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC) supplemental appropriation for release upon request and approval by the Committee for the MIA project. The bill would specify that the MIA project, acting through a designated representative, may submit a request to JFC for release of the funds for the MIA project to perform a mission for the recovery and identification of Wisconsin veterans who are missing in action under a 14-day passive review. AB 26 was introduced on February 10, 2023, and referred to the Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs. A public hearing on the bill was held on March 23, 2023, and the bill was recommended for passage by a vote of 13-0 on April 19, 2023. SB 8 was introduced on January 27 and referred to the Committee on Labor, Regulatory Reform, Veterans and Military Affairs.

6. AB 26/SB 8 would require that the request include a research prospectus and spending

plan for the mission for which the funding is requested. A copy of the request, the prospectus, and the spending plan would be required to be concurrently provided to the appropriate Legislative standing committees of each house dealing with veterans matters, the Governor, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Military Affairs. The bill would also specify that within seven days of receiving the request, the standing committees may submit a written recommendation to JFC regarding the request. If, within 14 working days after receiving the request, the cochairpersons of JFC do not notify the MIA project representative that the Committee has scheduled a meeting for the purpose of reviewing the request, the request is considered approved. The bill would also specify that if the JFC cochairpersons notify the MIA project representative that a meeting has been scheduled, the request is approved only upon express approval of the Committee.

7. Under AB 26/SB 8, if the request is approved by JFC, the MIA project, acting through its representative, is required to submit a report by June 30, 2025, on the mission's findings and an accounting of all of the following: (a) a detailed budget breakdown showing how all funding provided was spent; (b) a statement of the number of cases identified; (c) a description of all cases during the time frame funds were received including current progress and future planned actions such as letters to the family or missions abroad; (d) a calculation of the cost to continue with additional missions, identifying the data and methodology used to make the calculation; (e) identification of the amount and source of all funds raised for the cases that were in addition to the funding provided; (f) a detailed description of the involvement of the federal Department of Defense (DOD) in the mission, along with information identifying all other missions or cases on which the MIA project has worked with the federal DOD in the past and all missions or cases on which the MIA project expects to work with the DOD in fiscal years 2025-26 and 2026-27, including what arrangements the MIA project has made with the DOD to continue with future missions; and (g) a detailed description of the role UW System students played in the mission or in connection with the mission, including how students were utilized to accomplish the objectives of the mission, whether involved students were paid or received academic credit or neither, and whether the MIA project provided any classroom instruction or coursework to involved students. The bill would be effective on the day after publication, or on the second day after the publication of the 2023 biennial budget act, whichever is later.

8. In his 2021-23 biennial budget bill, the Governor proposed \$360,000 of funding for the biennium for the project, the same amount that would be provided under 2023 AB 26/SB 8 (\$180,000 each year of the biennium). If \$360,000 of funding would be provided, the project would focus on expanding efforts investigating and recovering missing Wisconsin service members, in addition to continuing their DPAA assigned work. This funding would cover the following: (a) recovery costs including a scientific recovery expert salary and fringe benefits, emergency medical coverage, scouting analysis, recovery logistics, metal detection, field supplies and landowner compensation; (b) research costs including genealogist/archival expert salary and fringe benefits, historical research supplies, and travel and lodging costs; (c) project logistics including the project assistant salary and fringe costs, student stipends, supplies, and travel and lodging costs; and (d) biological costs associated with testing recovered materials. The team leader notes that none of these funds support their salary as they are committed to utilizing all of the funds for direct project activities rather than administration. (Their primary position is as the associate director of the UW Biotechnology Center.)

9. If \$500,000 in annual funding is provided rather than \$180,000, the MIA project team

leader indicates the project could support one additional annual mission, additional scouting work, and provide additional student stipends and more thorough archival research. In addition to the mission in Poland, the project could add a mission in French Guinea. Having consistent annual funding would also allow them to be more aggressive with their historical investigations. For example, project members could travel to archives for lengthy periods of time to extract as much documentation as possible. Documents from the archives can cost up to a few thousand dollars per year and could cost up to \$10,000 if they were to expand the breadth of their investigations. In future years, missions could potentially be conducted in North Africa, Papua New Guinea, and South America.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Amount of Funding

a. Provide \$500,000 in 2023-24 and 2024-25 for the MIA Recovery and Identification Project.

ALT 1a	Change to Base
GPR	\$1,000,000

b. Provide \$360,000 in 2023-24 and 2024-25 for the MIA Recovery and Identification Project.

ALT 1b	Change to Base
GPR	\$720,000

c. Provide \$180,000 in 2023-24 and 2024-25 for the MIA Recovery and Identification Project.

ALT 1c	Change to Base
GPR	\$360,000

2. Manner of Providing Funding

- a. Provide funding in a new, continuing appropriation.
- b. Provide funding in the Committee's supplemental appropriation for release under a 14-day passive review process as specified in 2023 AB 26/SB 8.
- c. Provide funding in the Committee's supplemental appropriation for release upon a majority vote of the Committee.

3. Ongoing or One-Time

- a. Specify that funding would be one-time.
- b. Specify that funding would be ongoing.

4. Reporting Requirement

a. At the conclusion of the mission, require the MIA Recovery Project, through its representative, to submit a report on the mission's findings and an accounting of expenditures of the mission to the Governor, Joint Committee on Finance, Board of Regents, the standing committees of each house of the Legislature dealing with veterans matters, and the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Military Affairs.

b. Require a report to be submitted by June 30, 2025, as under 2023 AB 26/SB 8, with information on the following: (a) a detailed budget breakdown; (b) a statement of the number of cases identified; (c) information about all cases during the time frame funds were received; (d) a calculation of the cost to continue with additional missions; (e) identification of the amounts and sources of funds; (f) a description of the involvement of DOD; (g) a detailed description of the role UW System students played in the mission.

- c. Do not include a reporting requirement.

5. Take no action.

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